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ABSTRACT
                Multigrade grouping is the practice of intentionally
grouping two or more grade levels in the same classroom to enhance learning.
It is becoming a much discussed and implemented alternative grouping practice
in middle level education. This paper describes the implementation process of
two multigrade "teams" in two Florida middle schools, the Loggerhead Team and
the Piranha Team. The description is presented as a case study organized
around five research questions: (1) What is the process of implementing
multigrade/multiyear middle school teams? (2) What are the perceived benefits
to implementing multigrade/multiyear middle school teams? (3) What are the
perceived barriers to implementing such teams? (4) How do
multigrade/multiyear middle school teams operate on a day-to-day basis? and
(5) How do student outcomes in multigrade/multiyear middle school teams
compare with student outcomes in single grade middle school teams?
Observation showed that benefits of multigrade grouping include formation of
long-term relationships, continuity, and a family atmosphere. Barriers to
implementation include systemic barriers, lack of models, attitudes, and
time. Student outcomes were not substantially different from those for
students in single-grade teams. The paper concludes with a summary of
implications for principals, teachers, students, and parents, and
recommendations for future research. (EV)

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The Implementation Process of Two Multigrade/Multiyear Teams
in Two Middle Schools in South Florida:
A Cross-Site Case Study Presented at
The National Middle School Association Conference
in Baltimore, Maryland on November 1, 1996
By Margaret R. Heeney

Using case study methods, two middle school's efforts to implement

multigrade/multiyear teams are described and analyzed. The following description is

based on the five research questions answered and includes several important aspects of

multigrade teaming such as: background information about both schools, cross-site

comparisons, long-term relationships, continuity, family atmosphere, systemic barriers,

lack of models, attitudes, time, instruction, curriculum, assessment, achievement,

attendance, and discipline referrals. Also included are conclusions, implications for

practice, and recommendations for future research.

Multigrade grouping is the practice of intentionally grouping two or more grade

levels in the same classroom to enhance learning (Miller, 1996). The grouping across

grades and ages of students is becoming a much discussed and implemented alternative

grouping practice in middle level education. However, virtually no research base supports

the concept of multigrade teaming.

Graded education is firmly entrenched in the American educational system and too

often all students are forced into the same mold. Young adolescents experience extreme

diversity in their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Dividing students

according to age places artificial and often times short-sighted expectations on them.

Multigrade grouping eliminates learning based solely on age segregation. In the 1990s,

multigrade teaming in the middle school has emerged as an innovative organizational

alternative to single age grouping. A cross-site case study on multigrade teams was conducted at Smith Middle School and Bead Middle School.

Smith and Bead Middle Schools

The implementation process of two multigrade middle school teams was studied in two middle schools in South Florida. Each school implemented a pilot multigrade team composed of an equal number of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The students and teachers on each team stayed together for three years. Each year one-third of the students (the eighth graders) left the program and one third of the students (the sixth graders) were new to the team. The study was mainly qualitative in nature. Data were collected through classroom observations and through observing team meetings. Forty-two students, eleven teachers, thirty parents, and three administrators were interviewed. Some quantitative data were analyzed: achievement test scores, attendance rates, discipline referrals, and other archival data.

Smith Middle School, had a largely homogeneous population in terms of socioeconomic status. The student population was ninety-nine percent white and middle or upper middle class. The school building was three years old and the school population was approximately fourteen hundred. The multigrade team studied at Smith Middle School was the Loggerhead Team. Approximately half the students on the Loggerhead Team were gifted. The entire administration at Smith was new in the 1995-1996 school year. The team was implemented in the 1993-1994 school year as a pilot team and had been in existence for three years at the time of the study. The Loggerhead Team was implemented to improve academic performance and to enhance affective development of

2

3

the students. The teachers were hand picked by the principal to ensure a high quality of

teaching. Once the teachers were selected, they took over the implementation process.

The multigrade program at Smith Middle School was a parent choice program.

Bead Middle School, had a more diverse population. About sixteen percent of the

population were minorities, mostly African American. The students ranged from low to

high socioeconomic levels. Bead Middle School was an old campus and had a student

body of approximately eight hundred fifty. The administration at Bead was stable and had

been in place for several years. The multigrade team studied at Bead was the Piranha

Team. The Piranha Team was implemented during the 1994-1995 school year as a pilot

team and had been in existence for two years at the time of the study. The principal was a

strong advocate for multigrade grouping and remained supportive of the teachers

throughout the program. After the teachers were selected to teach on the Piranha Team,

the teachers took over the implementation process. The Piranha Team served the gifted

population at Bead Middle School. During the first year of implementation, the Piranha

Team was not a parent choice program. Students were randomly selected to be on the

team. During the second year of implementation, parent requests for their children not to

be on a multigrade team were honored.

Other than the fact that both the Loggerhead and the Piranha Teams served the

gifted population at the schools, each team resembled the student body of their school.

Both teams had a gifted and a learning disabled component. The Loggerhead Team also

had a full-time Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program attached to the team.

About twenty students stayed in a self-contained classroom most of the day. The classes

3

on the Loggerhead and Piranha teams had roughly an equal number of students from the

sixth, seventh, and eighth grade.

Cross-Site Comparisons

Five research questions were answered during the case study. Below is a summary

of each question.

Research Question One: What is the process of implementing multigrade/multiyear
middle school teams?

In both cases, the initial idea to implement multigrade teams came from the

principal. The principals at both schools were strong advocates for multigrade grouping.

The multigrade teams were implemented to raise the academic achievement of students

and to establish good middle school practices. The principals brought the idea up to their

shared decision making committees and the idea was discussed further. In each case, the

shared decision making committees decided to implement one multigrade team as a pilot.

The next step in the implementation process was to identify teachers to work on the

teams. Both principals announced to the entire faculty that a multigrade pilot team would

be implemented. Teachers volunteered to work on the multigrade teams. The principals

chose the teachers on the basis of several criteria: experience, communication

skills, flexibility, and subject area knowledge.

After the teachers were selected to work on the teams, the implementation process

was turned over to the teachers. The administration continued to operate in the capacity

of support. The administration provided research, resources, and public relations backing.

The teachers planned how the multigrade teams operated. The teachers made decisions

about how students were grouped; how the curriculum was organized and delivered; how

4

student assessment occurred; and what materials were used. The teachers were empowered to make decisions that affected their lives as teachers and the lives of their students.

The administration decided how students would be selected and what type of students would be on the multigrade teams. For example the administration decided the teams would serve both the gifted and learning disabled students.

The teachers had little time to plan for the implementation of the teams. The teachers on both teams spent a few days in the summer planning for the implementation of the teams. Both teams reported that they did not have nearly enough time to plan for multigrade grouping. Both teams of teachers started teaching multigrade classes and learned as they went along. The teams tried various techniques and then evaluated the success or failure. The teams learned by trial and error.

The implementation of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment was conducted by the teachers on both teams. How the curriculum, instruction, and assessment would be implemented was discussed and decided during the few days of planning in the summer before the first year of implementation. Other than the research read, the teachers had little knowledge of how to implement multigrade curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The teachers tried out various methods and then met at least once a week to discuss the implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Research Question Two: What are the perceived benefits to implementing multigrade/multiyear middle school teams?

Long-Term Relationships

The teachers, parents, students, and administrators reported many perceived benefits to implementing multigrade teams. One major benefit was the long-term relationship between the students, teachers, and parents. The students reported that they liked knowing who their teachers would be every year and knowing what to expect from their teachers. Less anxiety was felt by students returning to the same team the second and third years of implementation. The students felt comfortable in the classes and felt they were treated fairly.

The teachers reported that the long-term relationships allowed them to "really get to know" the students academically and on a personal level. Because the teachers were able to throughly understand the academic strengths and weaknesses over three years, the teachers felt they were better able to diagnose the learning needs of the students. The administration felt that the long-term relationships allowed the teachers to better understand the academic needs of the students. The principals reported that the multigrade teams allowed students to work on short term and long term goals.

The teachers reported that because they were able to know the students well, there were fewer discipline problems. Many discipline problems were eliminated because the teachers were familiar with the moods of the students and could head off discipline problems before they became serious. The principals reported that there were fewer discipline problems on the multigrade teams and that the behavior in general of the multigrade students was positive.

6

The parents developed a comfortable relationship with their children's teachers. Parent involvement tended to decrease over the three years because the parents were confident in the teachers and felt their children were getting a good education. The parents also reported that because the teachers knew their child well, the child was not able to get away with anything. In other words, the parents and the teachers knew the child's excuses. After the first year in the teams, both the parents and the students knew the expectations of the teachers. The Piranha Team made the effort to call parents in the beginning of the year and sent newsletters home periodically. The Loggerhead Team gained the support of the parents prior to implementing the team. Once the team was implemented, very little communication with parents occurred. Both teams had low parent contact or involvement.

Continuity

Another major benefit of multigrade teaming was continuity. The teachers, students, and parents reported that the continuity on the multigrade teams benefitted students academically and socially. The teachers reported that the continuity of the curriculum from year to year avoided gaps in the learning process. The teachers developed a three-year curriculum plan based on the interests and needs of the students. The beginning of each year started quickly because there was not as much of a need to spend time diagnosing students.

The students reported liking the continuity in relationships. The students felt comfortable coming back to the same teachers and to their friends. The students developed close relationships with students of all ages. Often, the students reported being

7

sad at their eighth grade friends leaving and often the eighth graders expressed being sad at leaving the team.

The parents reported the continuity of the multigrade program as one of the main reasons for wanting their children to be on a multigrade team. The parents felt their children were better served if they returned to a familiar environment each year. Parents reported that their children were able to form lasting relationships with adults and students. Some parents reported that their children had trouble adjusting to new situations and that the continuity of the multigrade team had made the transitions throughout middle school easier.

Family Atmosphere

Another benefit of multigrade teaming was the development of a family atmosphere. Teachers and students were able to develop relationships based on mutual respect which promoted a healthy learning environment. The teachers felt that the mixed ages of students resembled a family and enabled all students to feel comfortable in the learning environment. The teachers reported that less mature students were able to feel competent socially and academically because of the mixed ages. The more mature students developed relationships with older students with similar maturity levels.

Students also reported a good rapport with the teachers. The students felt their teachers cared about them as individuals because they took time to talk with them about their lives in and out of school. Being in mixed age classes pleased most of the students. Younger students reported that they liked having older students in class that could help them. Older students reported that helping younger students made them feel good about

themselves.

The parents reported that the family atmosphere of the multigrade teams helped their children feel comfortable and accepted by peers and adults. Many parents reported that their children had increased self-esteem because often for the first time their child was able to help another child. Parents reported that having students from three grade levels together in one class allowed role modeling to occur. Many parents reported that their children looked up to the older students on the team.

Research Question Three: What are the perceived barriers to implementing multigrade/multiyear middle school teams?

Systemic Barriers

Most of the barriers to implementing multigrade teams were systemic. The teachers and administration stated that all data such as attendance or achievement had to be reported to the State based on grade level. The state requirements for reporting caused school level barriers to implementing multigrade teams. The system requirements of reporting data by grade level initially caused more work for the staff. Often, such barriers were overcome by making technology meet their needs.

There were institutional barriers to implementing multigrade teams at the school level. Both schools were used to traditional grade level grouping and particularly in the first year of implementation both teams had to constantly remind the school that they did not fit into a grade level mold. Both teams had to make decisions about how grade level activities would be handled. For example, the multigrade teams ran into scheduling problems such as how to handle seventh grade vision tests. For various reasons, students

9

in one grade level were required to attend a single grade event outside of the team. The teachers had to decide how to handle such situations.

Another barrier to implementing multigrade teams was isolation. Because each team was a pilot team and the only multigrade team at the school for the first year, both the teachers and the students felt isolated. The teachers did not have other teachers on campus to turn to for support. The students felt isolated from their grade level friends. In the first year of implementation, the eighth graders on both teams were unhappy about being on a multigrade team.

Lack of Models

Another barrier in the implementation process was the lack of models. Because multigrade middle school teams were not implemented on a wide scale and most of the research on multigrade grouping did not apply to the middle school, the teachers had limited information to model their teams on. The teams were not based on any models and the teachers had no training to teach multigrade classes.

Attitudes

Another barrier to implementation was the preconceived perceptions about education of the students, parents, and other teachers on campus. The teachers and administration reported that some teachers on the campuses did not believe it was good for students to be grouped in multigrade classes. In the early stages of implementation, the teachers and administration had to do a lot of public relations work to explain to the parents the concept of multigrade grouping. Initially, many parents believed in the traditional single grade grouping of students because that was what they knew.

11

Time

One barrier that was continually mentioned by teachers was time. The teachers reported that there were many innovations that they would like to try with their teams but they did not have the time to plan. Time was the most mentioned barrier to the implementation of thematic teaching. The teachers had limited time to plan for implementation and to develop the curriculum. The implementation of multigrade teams required a shift in the way education was delivered. One team meeting a week was not enough time to plan and evaluate the curriculum, instruction, and assessment of the multigrade teams. Time is not only a limiting factor for multigrade teams but also for single grade teams. Given more time for planning and evaluation, both teams would probably have been more innovation in the delivery of multigrade education.

Research Question Four: How do multigrade/multiyear middle school teams operate on a day to day basis?

Instruction

The keys to the operation of the two multigrade teams studied were variety, flexibility, and good teaching practices. The classes for the most part had roughly equal numbers of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. The classes were taught with mixed ages. In other words, the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders all did the same work and had the same expectations. The teachers did not lower their expectations for younger students. Instead, the students who needed it were given more time or individualized help.

Both teams were formed for two reasons: to promote academic achievement and to enhance affective development. Each team tried to develop the maximum potentialities

11

of each student and provide them with experiences to develop the skills necessary to be productive members of society. Both teams designed the learning environment so that the students would view learning as fun and want to learn.

The day to day grouping practices of both the Loggerhead and the Piranha Teams were flexible and varied. Both the Loggerhead and Piranha Team teachers grouped and regrouped students on a regular basis. Group work was one of the main modes of instruction on both teams. Classes were regrouped throughout the year based on the needs of the students.

Grouping practices on both teams were established to promote a collaborative learning environment. Because the Loggerhead Team had very little diversity, the groups of students did not have students with varying backgrounds. The Piranha Team did have students of varying backgrounds and groups were established to promote students of varying interests, backgrounds, and ages working together. The teachers on both teams rarely used textbooks except in Math. Usually, when a textbook was used, it was as a reference. The teachers used a wide variety of materials including: maps, videos, filmstrips, magazines, books, newspapers, and other materials.

The teachers used a variety of methods to address the various reading levels of students. At times, students were able to choose their own reading materials. When the whole class read the same material, often it was read out loud or in pairs. The teachers were aware of the variety of reading levels in their classes and took steps to ensure that no student was left to struggle with material that was too difficult for him or her.

Curriculum

The teachers on both teams developed the curriculum as a three-year plan based on the needs of their students. The teachers felt having the freedom to integrate the curriculum over a three-year span was one of the biggest advantages of multigrade grouping. Being able to teach a unit that was normally part of the sixth grade curriculum while the eighth grade curriculum was being taught made the curriculum make sense to the students.

The teachers and administrators felt that teaching in themes was an effective way to teach multigrade classes. The teachers on both teams implemented some thematic units but did not do as much thematic teaching as they would have liked because of time. The teachers did not have the time or the expertise to develop thematic units. On average, both teams taught between two and three thematic units per year. What occurred more often than thematic units that cut across all disciplines were for only two or three classes to participate on a theme. Each individual teacher pulled out themes in developing the three-year curriculum for their individual course.

The teachers on both teams emphasized the learning process. All the teachers wanted to instill a love of learning in the students. One of the main goals of both teams was for the students to become life long learners. The teachers tried to provide the students with the skills and knowledge to continue learning after the students left the team. On a day to day basis, the teachers tried to relate the curriculum to the lives of the students and to what was happening in the world today. The teachers did not see any inherent sequence to the curriculum other than in Math.

A difference between the Loggerhead and Piranha Teams was the amount of individualized curriculum that was used. The curriculum on the Loggerhead Team was rarely individualized. All the students worked with the same curriculum and had the same expectations. The Loggerhead teachers believed that students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade could all learn the same curriculum and have the same high expectations. The Loggerhead teachers gave students who needed it more time and help. The Loggerhead teachers could expect all the students to work with the same curriculum because the student population was nearly homogenous.

Most of the students on the Piranha Team worked with the same curriculum and had the same expectations, however, the learning disabled students often used individualized curriculum. The Piranha Team had a wider range of learning abilities than the Loggerhead Team. The full-time ESE students were in a self-contained classroom and their curriculum was completely different from the rest of the team.

Assessment

The teachers on both teams felt that variety was essential to assessment. The students were assessed in a variety of ways including: traditional tests, rubrics, portfolios, writing, group projects, and other ways. The teachers on both teams assessed students in part because they had to have a grade to put on the report card. The teachers felt that students should be assessed on their effort and deserved some recognition for their efforts. The main goal in assessing students was to provide some type of measure of progress for the student. Students were assessed in terms of their past achievement rather than group norms. The students on both teams reported that the teachers frequently informed them of

14

their progress.

Research Question Five: How do student outcomes in multigrade/multiyear middle school teams compare with student outcomes in single grade middle school teams?

To answer research question five, each of the multigrade teams were broken down by grade level and each grade level was compared to a single grade team in the same school. Both the Loggerhead and the Piranha Teams were the only gifted program in each school. This data may be skewed because the single grade teams and the multigrade teams were already existing groups and were not matched by achievement.

A. How does academic achievement of students on multigrade/multiyear teams compare to the single grade teams?

On the Loggerhead Team, all three grade levels scored better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) than the single grade teams. The test was administered at the end of the second year of implementation. The sixth grade had the largest advantage in achievement. In other words, the sixth graders on the Loggerhead Team outscored the sixth graders on the single grade team by a wider margin than did the seventh and eighth graders.

The NAEP was administered to the Piranha Team at the end of the first year of implementation. Like the Loggerhead Team, the sixth and seventh graders on the Piranha Team slightly out scored the students on the single grade teams. The largest differences in achievement were in Reading and Language.The eighth graders on the Piranha Team scored slightly lower than the students on the single grade team. One reason for the lower scores may have that during the first year of implementation many of the eighth graders on the Piranha Team were not happy about being on a multigrade team. Multigrade

15

grouping did not greatly improve nor decrease academic achievement.

All eighth graders in Florida take the Florida Grade Eight Writing Assessment. Scores on the writing assessment of the eighth grade Loggerhead students were compared to a single eighth grade team. The Loggerhead eighth grade students scored slightly higher on the writing assessment. The same comparisons were made for the Piranha Team and a single eighth grade team at Bead Middle School. On the Florida Grade Eight Writing Assessment, the Piranha Team scored slightly higher than the single grade team. It can be concluded that the multigrade team did not harm the writing of the eighth grade students.

The results of both achievement tests were similar to previous research. Milburn (1981) found that the academic achievement of students in multigrade grouping was not harmed and was usually slightly higher than single grade groupings. Milburn (1981) also found that students in the lower grades tended to have higher academic achievement than their age mates but that the level of achievement evened out as the students became older. On both the Loggerhead and the Piranha Teams, the sixth and seventh grade students had more of a gap in achievement between teams than the eighth graders. On the eighth grade writing assessment, the multigrade students and the single grade students scored nearly the same.

B. How does attendance in a multigrade/multiyear team compare with single grade teams?

On average, the students on the multigrade teams came to school one or two days more than students on the single grade teams. The attendance rates of gifted students did not vary from nongifted students. The multigrade teams did not seem to affect the

16

17

attendance rate of the students.

C. How does the number of discipline referrals compare between multigrade/multiyear teams and single grade teams?

The Loggerhead and the Piranha Team students both received far fewer discipline referrals than the students in the single grade teams. One reason for this could be that because of the multiyear aspect of the teams, the teachers and students developed close relationships. The teachers knew the students and were able to head off discipline problems before they started. The teachers and students only went through one period at the beginning of the first year where the students felt the need to test the teacher. When the students came back for the second year, there was no need to test the teacher.

Conclusions and Implications

The initial idea for implementing a multigrade team at both schools came from the principal. Once the teachers were selected to staff the two multigrade teams, the implementation process was turned over to the teachers. The administration continued to provide support throughout the programs. Time was one of the largest barriers to implementing multigrade teams. The teachers had limited time to plan for implementation or to evaluate the programs.

The perceived benefits to implementing multigrade teams were the development of long-term relationships, continuity, and a family atmosphere. The long-term relationships between the teachers and students allowed the needs of students both academically and socially to be better diagnosed. The continuity of the curriculum and of relationships helped students develop academically and affectively. The continuity of multigrade teams provided a comfortable learning environment for students. The development of a family

17

atmosphere helped the students and teachers to develop a good rapport. The students and teachers were able to develop respect for each other.

The teachers, parents, students, and administrators also perceived some barriers to implementing multigrade teams including: systemic barriers, lack of models, attitudes, and time. Both teams reported constantly running into systemtic barriers such as reporting attendance or achievement by grade level. Other systematic barriers included grade level activities and a feeling of isolation on the part of the teachers and students. Almost no research and consequently no models exist on middle school multigrade teams. Neither team had a model to base their program. Both teams had to work hard to overcome the attitudes of students, parents, and other teachers. Many people believed that it was unnatural to group students without reference to age. The lack of time for planning and evaluation was a major barrier to the implementation process.

The Loggerhead and the Piranha Teams operated on a day to day basis much like any other good middle school team. The keys to the operation of the multigrade teams were flexibility, variety, and good teaching practices. Both teams sought to develop autonomous self-directed learners. The curriculum and grouping practices were formed around the unique needs of the students. The teachers emphasized cooperative learning and the learning process as well as the final product. The teachers acted as facilitators and tried to motivate students through success and interest. The teachers provided a variety of materials and assessment options for the students.

The student outcomes on the multigrade teams were not that different from the student outcomes on single grade teams. With the exception of the eighth grade students

18

on the Piranha Team, the students on the multigrade teams scored higher or about the

same on the NAEP. The younger students on the multigrade teams tended to outscore the

younger students on the single grade teams. On the Florida Grade Eight Writing

Assessment, the eighth graders on both the multigrade and single grade teams had about

the same achievement. The findings on both measures of achievement were in line with

previous research. The attendance rate did not seem to be affected by multigrade

grouping. Discipline seemed to be improved on the multigrade teams which was probably

due to continuing relationships.

Implications for the Principal

The following points should be considered when implementing a multigrade middle

school team:

1. Select teachers who are committed to multigrade/multiyear grouping and allow them to be leaders.
2. Communicate with the parents prior to the implementation. The parents and the students will need to be sold on the concept.
3. In the first year of implementation, consider that eighth grade students may not be happy about being mixed with younger students.
4. The teachers need the freedom to organize the team to meet the needs of mixed age classes.
5. Be aware that a multigrade/multiyear team will affect the rest of the school in terms of exploratory classes and how data such as attendance or achievement test scores are collected and reported.
6. An innovative practice such as multigrade/multiyear teaming will need strong advocates in the form of teachers, parents, students, and administrators.
7. Provide the time needed for planning and evaluation for the teachers.
8. Plan for the fact that the State will want data reported by grade level.

19

9.   When necessary, alter school practices that are divided by grade level. When implementing a multigrade team, it is important to realize that the school is no longer totally divided according to grade level.
10.   Plan for scheduling problems such as if band is only taught one period, do the students on the multigrade team get to be in band or not?
11.   Provide opportunities for students to mix with age mates in all school activities such as intermural sports.

Implications for Teachers

1.   Break the conventional mold of education. Multigrade middle school teams are an innovative practice; don't do the same old thing.
2.   Realize that you should have different expectations for different students.
3.   The curriculum needs to be individualized to some extent.
4.   Realize that it takes a lot of time to develop and implement an innovative program.
5.   No matter how much time it takes, thematic units are an effective way to deliver multigrade instruction.
6.   Realize that students, parents, and other teachers on your campus may not agree with the concept of multigrade grouping. You will have to become an advocate for multigrade grouping.

Implications for Students

1.   Realize that you may be isolated from many of your age mates.
2.   Be aware that you will remain with the same teachers and peers for three years.
3.   You may have more responsibility for mentoring younger students.
4.   If students you are on a pilot multigrade team, you may feel you are being treated differently.
5.   You may or may not like being mixed with younger and older students.
6.   You may have to remain with a teacher you do not like for three years.
7.   Realize that you may be only one of a few students from your grade level in exploratory classes.
8.   Older students on the team will be able to help you adjust to a new team. Older students can help you with your assignments or help you open your locker.
9.   You will have friends of all ages and get to be with the same friends for three years.

20

Implications for Parents

1. Stay involved in your child's education. No matter how much your child may like a multigrade team, it is still your responsibility to stay involved in your child's educational process.
2. Find out how multigrade teaming will be implemented at your child's school. Find out how the teachers and principal define multigrade teaming.
3. Multigrade teaming is one alternative to traditional grade level grouping. Realize that multigrade teaming is not the answer to all the problems in education. Identify goals of the program at your child's school.
4. Multigrade teaming is not for all students.
5. Most likely a lot of cooperative learning and group work will be done in a multigrade team. Realize that cooperative learning is an effective instructional strategy.
6. Realize that just because you are familiar with single grade grouping that does not mean single grade groupings are the best educational practice.
7. Often, the exploratory classes offered at middle schools are limited. Mixing three grade levels in one team sometimes limits the exploratory classes even more. All students on a multigrade team have to go to exploratory classes at the same time but the offerings at that time may be limited. For example, at the time your child goes to exploratory only sixth grade band may be offered. That might be a problem for a seventh or eighth grade student that has already had a year or two of band. Work with your child's school to solve such problems.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Study of the effects of a multigrade/multiyear middle school program has on the high school experience.
2. A longitudinal study that follows students through a multigrade/multiyear middle school team and on to high school.
3. An in-depth look at the affective development of students in a multigrade/multiyear team.
4. An in-depth look at the academic achievement of students in a multigrade/multiyear team.
5. A study of how multigrade/multiyear teams differ from single grade teams.
6. A study of the curriculum innovations on a multigrade/multiyear team.
7. A study of how multigrade/multiyear teams use flexible scheduling.

21

8.   A study on student interaction on multigrade/multiyear teams
      including mentoring, leadership development, cross-age friendships,
      etc.

Middle schools around the country are beginning to implement multigrade teams.

The research base on multigrade teaming is practically nonexistent. More research needs

to be conducted on multigrade teaming to provide data for middle level practioners.

In a multigrade middle school team, varied student development is viewed as a

normal part of human growth. The emotions of young adolescents reach the extremes of

high and low during this time of development. No two adolescents develop, grow, or

mature at the same rate. Middle school students are extremely diverse in their reactions to

school and social events. Placing young adolescents in a mixed-age environment can help

offset some of the awkwardness of varying developmental rates.

Multigrade middle school teams address the needs of the young adolescent in many

ways. Middle school students may benefit if they feel a bond to their peers, teachers and

the school. Multigrade teams can help students develop bonds and become productive

members of society. Multigrade teams provide continuity in relationships and curriculum

for young adolescents and helps students to develop a strong self concept as well as

develop cognitively.

As this study illustrates, multigrade grouping can provide a viable alternative to

graded education. Once the barriers of time; perceptions of students, parents, and

teachers; systemic concerns; and the lack of models are overcome, multigrade middle

school teams can provide students with a safe secure learning environment. The benefits

for students in a multigrade team include: continuity in curriculum and the development

of long-term relationships. The benefits of multigrade teaming outweigh the barriers.

Multigrade middle school teams eliminate grouping based solely on age segregation.

Multigrade middle school teams are one alternative that gives students the chance to

develop cognitively and affectively in a supportive and comfortable environment.

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